

# ST. THOMAS AQUINAS,

*Doctor of the Church and Patron of Catholic Schools.*

(1225-1274.)

## I.—Birth and Early Life.

The thirteenth century was a time of extraordinary intellectual activity, which was not without its dangers. In the enthusiastic pursuit of learning, students flocked by thousands to the great Universities, which, unhappily, were as often schools of infidelity as of faith. The philosophers of the age owned but one master, and he was a heathen. "Aristotle," says Lacordaire, "was taken to be the representative of wisdom; and, unfortunately, Aristotle and the Gospel did not always agree;" and many, entering on the unexplored sea of thought without a guide, made hopeless shipwreck of their faith. The great professors who were the oracles of the day were not always proof against the seductions of vanity, and sometimes tried to make themselves a name by striking out bold theories in matters where original speculation is seldom friendly to the faith.

It was amidst the confusion of these new opinions that St. Thomas Aquinas was given to the world to mark out the limits of Christian philosophy, and to form the separate materials of dogmatic, moral, and speculative theology into one grand and finished structure, whilst at the same time he enriched the Church's liturgy with some of the most beautiful of its devotional formularies, and displayed in his life and character all the virtues and winning graces of a Saint.

Picturesquely situated in southern Italy on the top of a rugged cliff flanking a spur of the Apennines, and overlooking the rushing waters of the Melfi, there stood in mediæval times the fortress of Rocca-Secca. Here St. Thomas was born about the year 1225 (authors are not agreed as to the precise date); and to the neighboring little town of Aquino he owed his surname of Aquinas. The count, his father, was nephew to the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, and on his mother's side, he was descended from the Norman Barons who had con-

quered Sicily two centuries before. The Aquino family could claim relationship with St. Gregory the Great, and was allied by blood to St. Louis of France and St. Ferdinand of Castille.

The future vocation and sanctity of the little Thomas had been predicted to his mother, the Countess Theodora, by a holy hermit of the name of Bonus; and, whilst he was yet an infant, God's watchful Providence over him was manifested in a striking manner. A terrific thunderstorm burst over the Castle, and his nurse and his little sister were struck dead in the very chamber in which Thomas slept on unharmed. This circumstance accounts for the great fear of thunder and lightning which the Saint is said to have had throughout life, which caused him often to take refuge in the church during a thunderstorm, even leaning his head against the Tabernacle, so as to place himself as closely as possible under the protection of our Lord.\*

The words *Ave Maria* were the first which his baby lips were heard to utter. Long before he could read, a book was discovered to be an unfailing means of drying his tears in all his childish woes; he would delight in handling it, turning over the leaves with infantine gravity.

When only five years old, his education was begun by the monks of the celebrated Benedictine Abbey of Monte Cassino, which was only a few miles distant from Rocca-Secca.

The monks found that their new pupil was a grave, quiet child, who loved to spend much of his

\* Hence the popular devotion to St. Thomas as Patron against thunderstorms and sudden death. Crosses are blessed against lightning, bearing on one side the image of the Saint and on the other a Latin inscription, which he left traced on the wall of a cavern at Anagni, into which he more than once retired during a thunderstorm, and of which the following is a translation: "The Cross to me is certain salvation. The Cross is that which I ever adore. The Cross of the Lord is with me. The Cross is my refuge."

time in the church, and was never without a book in his hand. He had considerable influence over his young companions, whom he was always ready to help, and to whom the sweetness of his disposition rendered him very dear; but he cared little for the sports of childhood, in which he seldom took part. One day, when the rest of the merry band were playing in the woods, Thomas was standing apart in silent thought; the monk in charge of the boys inquired the subject of his reflections. The child raised his head and said: "Tell me, master, what is God?" This was his oft-repeated question, and it showed that the whole bent of his mind and heart was already directed heavenward.

At ten years old, he had made such progress in his studies that his parents resolved to send him, under the care of a tutor, to the newly-founded University of Naples. Before doing so, however, they took him to spend some weeks with them at another of their castles at Loreto, a spot afterwards destined to become so famous as the resting-place of the Holy House of Nazareth. A famine prevailed at the time, and Thomas delighted in distributing the abundant alms which his charitable parents had set aside for the poor. He carried his liberality so far that the steward of the castle complained to his father. The Count waylaid the child as he was hurrying with bread to the gate and sternly asked what was hidden under his cloak. Thomas let go the folds, and there fell to the ground, not the food which he had taken, but a profusion of lovely and sweet-scented flowers.

On his arrival in Naples, the extraordinary talents of which he had already given proof under his Benedictine teachers, became more and more manifest, whilst at the same time he made rapid progress in the science of the Saints. He was continually held up as a model to his fellow-students in a way most painful to his humility; but the modesty, sweetness, and gentleness of his character preserved him from envy, and gained for him universal affection. He shunned all occasions of evil, and devoted his leisure hours to prayer and good works. The Dominican church became one of his favorite resorts; and, as he poured forth his soul in prayer before the altar, bright rays of light

were more than once seen to issue from his countenance.

A holy Friar, named John of St. Julian, who had witnessed the wonderful sight, one day said to the pious youth: "God has given you to our Order." Thomas threw himself on his knees, saying that he had long and ardently desired to take the habit, but that he feared he was unworthy of so great a grace. The Community joyfully admitted the young student; and, whilst still almost a boy, he was publicly clothed in the white habit of St. Dominic.

The news soon reached the ears of the Countess Theodora, his mother, who, recognizing in the event the fulfillment of the holy hermit's prophecy, hastened to Naples to congratulate her son. Thomas and the brethren, however, who were ignorant of her dispositions, were much alarmed at the idea of the impending visit, and, in compliance with his own earnest entreaties, the novice was hurried off to the Convent of Santa Sabina in Rome. Thither his mother followed him, but she was unable to induce him to consent to an interview. The General of the Order, John the German, was on the point of starting for Paris and resolved to take Thomas and three other companions with him; and they accordingly left Rome together.

When Theodora found herself thus foiled and mistrusted, she became furious against the friars, and sent orders to her two elder sons, who were then serving in the Emperor's army in Italy, to waylay their brother and bring him back to her. The little party of friars were overtaken and seized as they were taking their midday rest by a wayside fountain. The rough soldiers tried to tear the habit from Thomas's back; but his stout resistance compelled them to give up the attempt. His companions were suffered to continue their journey, whilst the young novice was carried off to his angry parents at Rocca-Secca.

The Countess was now determined that he should never be a Dominican; and his father, who would gladly have seen him assume the Benedictine habit, that, like one of his uncles, he might rise to the dignity of Abbot of Monte Cassino, was equally determined that he should never belong to the despised mendicant Order he had embraced. Tears,

threats and entreaties proving powerless to shake the Saint's resolution, he was imprisoned in one of the towers of the Castle, where he had to suffer cold, hunger, and every sort of privation.

His two sisters, Marietta and Theodora, to whom he was tenderly attached, vainly endeavored by their affectionate caresses to induce him to yield to his mother's wishes; but they were themselves won to a life of perfection; and both eventually died in the odor of sanctity, one as a Benedictine Abbess, the other in the married state as Countess of San Severino. Through their instrumentality, Thomas was enabled to obtain books and clothes from his Brethren at Naples. During his captivity, which lasted considerably more than a year, he managed to commit to memory the entire Bible and the five books of the "Sentences," the theological textbook of the time. His earliest writings are said to belong to the same period.

On the arrival of his brothers, Thomas's constancy was put to a yet more terrible trial. The two young officers conceived the infernal project of introducing a woman of evil life into his chamber; but with a flaming brand snatched from the hearth the Saint indignantly drove her from his presence. With the same brand he then traced a cross upon the wall; and, casting himself on his knees before it, besought of God to grant him the gift of perpetual chastity.

As he prayed, he fell into an ecstacy, during which two angels appeared to him and girded him with a miraculous cord, saying: "We are come from God to invest thee with the girdle of perpetual chastity. The Lord has heard thy prayer; and that which human frailty can never merit, is ensured to thee by the irrevocable gift of God." The angels girded him so tightly that he uttered an involuntary cry of pain, which brought some servants to the spot; but Thomas kept his secret to himself, and only revealed it on his deathbed to his confessor, Brother Reginald, declaring that from that day the spirit of darkness had never been allowed to approach him. The girdle was worn by the Saint till his death, and is still preserved at the Convent of Chieri in Piedmont.

By this time his family had discovered that his

firmness \* would not be overcome by persecution. Though unwilling to acknowledge themselves beaten, they connived at his escape, and, like St. Paul, he was let down from the tower in a basket to the Friars, who by appointment were waiting below. They carried off their rescued treasure to Naples, where he was immediately admitted to profession. One more attempt was made to shake his constancy by an appeal to the Pope, who summoned him to Rome; but the Saint pleaded his cause so well that the Holy Father was convinced of the reality of his vocation. In order to satisfy his family, however, and to secure in an important post the services of so gifted a subject, the Pope proposed to make him Abbott of Monte Cassino, whilst still continuing a Dominican. But St. Thomas implored so earnestly that he might be allowed to remain a simple religious in the Order he had chosen, that his Holiness yielded, and strictly forbade any further interference with his vocation.

To put him beyond reach of further molestation, the General of the Order took him with him to Cologne, where he became the disciple of Blessed Albert the Great, the renowned Dominican professor of the day. When St. Thomas found himself safe within the convent walls, he devoted himself with ardor to the work of his sanctification. His time was divided between prayer and study. His humility enabled him to conceal his vast powers of mind; and his absolute silence at all the scholastic disputations, rendered more conspicuous by his commanding stature and the portliness of his figure, led his companions to call him "the dumb ox of Sicily."

A good-natured fellow-student offered to explain the daily lessons to him, an offer which the Saint humbly and gratefully accepted. But one day the young teacher came to a difficult passage, which he interpreted wrongly. Then the Saint's charity and love of truth triumphed over his humility; and, taking the book, he explained the passage with the utmost clearness and precision. His astonished friend begged in future to be the scholar, to which

\* In the 16th century a Confraternity was established, called "the Angelic Warfare," to obtain through the intercession of St. Thomas the virtue of chastity. This Confraternity still flourishes and has been enriched with many Indulgences.

Thomas consented, on condition his secret should be kept. Shortly after this, a paper written by the Saint and containing a masterly solution of a most abstruse question, fell accidentally into the hands of Blessed Albert. Astonished at the genius it displayed, he next day put the learning of his saintly disciple to a public test, and exclaimed before the assembled students: "We call Brother Thomas 'the dumb ox'; but I tell you he will one day make his bellowing heard to the uttermost parts of the earth."

## II.—Work in His Order and in the Church.

In the summer of 1245, a year after St. Thomas's arrival at Cologne, the General Chapter commanded Blessed Albert to proceed to Paris in order to take the degree of Doctor in that University, and he obtained permission to take Brother Thomas as his companion. The two Saints set out on foot, staff in hand, carrying on their shoulders the breviary and Bible, to which Brother Thomas added the book of "Sentences." At midday they rested by some spring to eat the food they had begged on their way. At night they generally found shelter in the guest quarters of some monastery. In this manner they reached the convent of St. James at Paris, where St. Tomas became the model of the whole Community, by his spirit of prayer, his profound humility, perfect obedience, and universal charity. He tried to imitate the virtues he observed in his brethren, and judged himself utterly unworthy of living in such saintly company. Never was he known to utter an idle word; when he did speak, the charm of his heavenly conversation filled all who heard him with spiritual consolation. A celestial grace beamed from his beautiful countenance; so that some said they had only to look at him to feel within themselves a renewal of fervor.

A young Franciscan was at this time studying at Paris, Bonaventure by name, to whom St. Thomas became knit in bonds of closest friendship; they, who were in after ages to be honored in the Church as the Seraphic and Angelic Doctors, were dear to each other on earth as Jonathan and David; and after their three years of study, they were raised together to the degree of Bachelor of Theology, in 1248. In the November of that year, Blessed

Albert was sent back to Cologne, again accompanied by St. Thomas, who taught under his direction. Scholars were not slow to discover that the two Dominican professors excelled all others, and the new school at Cologne was soon filled to overflowing. St. Thomas's lessons fully bore out the five principles of teaching which he has himself laid down, viz., clearness, brevity, utility, sweetness, and maturity. He possessed a wonderful gift of communicating knowledge, so that more was learnt from him in a few months than from others in several years.

It was soon after his return to Cologne that the Saint was raised to the priesthood; from that time he seemed more closely than ever united to God. He used to spend many hours of the day and a great part of the night in the church; whilst offering the Holy Sacrifice he shed abundant tears, and the ardor of his devotion communicated itself to those who assisted at his Mass.

After teaching for four years at Cologne, Thomas was ordered by the General Chapter to prepare to take his degree as Doctor. This was a terrible blow to his humility, as he sincerely judged himself unfit for the dignity. On his way to Paris, whither he had now to repair, he preached at the court of the Duchess of Brabant, at whose request he wrote a treatise on the government of the Jews which is full of wisdom and moderation. Later on, he was often consulted on most important matters of state, especially by St. Louis of France, who was tenderly attached to him. He arrived in Paris in 1252, and from the first his success in teaching was so great that the vast halls of the Convent of St. James were unable to contain his audience. The University congratulated the Order on the acquisition of so great a treasure, and proposed at once to grant him the license preliminary to the acts required for taking the degree of Doctor, although he was nearly ten years under the age required by the statutes.

But this step was delayed by a dispute which arose between the Friars and the secular Doctors. The quarrel originated in the refusal of the former to take an oath to close their schools whenever the rights of the University were attacked; and it was fanned into a flame by the publication of a book, entitled "The Perils of the Latter Times," in which

the new mendicant Orders were attacked in the most calumnious and scandalous terms. This work, which came from the pen of a Paris Doctor, William de St. Amour, a man of violent and heretical opinions, was referred by St. Louis to the judgment of the Pope. St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure were summoned to the Papal Court to act as the champions of the regulars, and the pen of Blessed Albert the Great was also called into requisition. St. Thomas's eloquent defence procured the condemnation of the book, and delivered the mendicant Orders from destruction; and by the joint exertions of the Pope and St. Louis, the University was compelled to yield, and to readmit the Friars to their theological chairs.

On the 23d of October, 1257, the two Saints were allowed to take their Doctor's degree. St. Thomas's humility had been so sorely distressed at the idea of this promotion, that he could not bring himself to prepare the preliminary public address until the very eve of the day on which it was to be delivered. Then, as it would seem, by divine inspiration, he chose for his text the words of the 103d Psalm, v. 13: "Thou waterest the hills from Thy upper rooms; the earth shall be filled with the fruit of Thy works," words which he interpreted to refer to Jesus Christ, Who, as the head of men and angels, waters the heavenly spirits with glory, whilst He fills the Church militant on earth with the fruits of His works through the Sacraments, which apply the merits of His sacred Passion to our souls. But the event gave to this text the character of a prophecy regarding the Saint's own future career.

In 1259, St. Thomas was deputed, in concert with Blessed Albert and other learned men of the Order, to draw up ordinances to regulate the studies of the Brethren. A year or two later, he was summoned to Italy to teach in the schools attached to the Papal Court. As these schools followed the Pope from place to place, several of the great cities of Italy and many of the convents of his Order enjoyed for a time the privilege of the Saint's teaching. It is pleasant to think that the streets of the world's metropolis have probably been trodden by the feet of the holy Doctor, who is said to have been present at the General Chapter of the Order held in London in 1263.

After being for some time stationed in Rome, he was again appointed to teach in Paris in 1269. The Doctors of the University referred to his decision a controversy which had arisen concerning the sacramental species in the Holy Eucharist. After long and fervent prayer, the Saint put his own opinion on the subject into writing, laid the manuscript at the foot of the Crucifix on the Altar of the Blessed Sacrament, and then prayed as follows: "Lord Jesus, Who art truly present and dost work wonders in this adorable Sacrament, I implore thee to grant that, if what I have written be the truth, Thou wilt enable me to teach it; but that, if it contains anything contrary to the faith, Thou wilt hinder me from proceeding further in declaring it." Then the other Friars, who were watching, beheld our Lord Himself descend and stand upon the manuscript, and they heard from His Divine lips the words: "Thomas, thou hast written well concerning the Sacrament of My Body." The Saint immediately fell into an ecstasy, in which he was raised a cubit from the ground.

In 1271 he returned to Italy, and began to teach in Rome. During the following Holy Week he preached in St. Peter's on the Passion of our Lord; and those who heard him on Good Friday were moved to tears and ceased not to weep until Easter Day, when his Paschal sermon filled them with holy jubilation. On that day, as he came down from the pulpit, a poor woman who had been hopelessly ill for a long time kissed the hem of his mantle and was immediately cured. Meanwhile the Universities of Paris and of Naples were vying with each other in their efforts to get possession of the great Doctor. Naples gained the day; and the Saint accordingly repaired, towards the end of the summer of 1272, to this the last scene of his labors as a professor.

During all these busy years of teaching, St. Thomas's pen had been at work indefatigably, enriching the schools and the Church with invaluable treatises, which fill twenty volumes. Within the narrow limits of these pages it is impossible to do more than name a very few of his most important writings. He commented on the works of Aristotle, and purged the text of the pagan philosopher from

everything opposed to the truths of the faith, whilst at the same time he chose the terms of Aristotle's philosophy as the most scientific classification of the ideas of the human mind, and thus established a complete system of Christian philosophy. His "Summa Against the Gentiles" was written by command of St. Raymond of Pennafort, the third General of the Order, to combat the false philosophical doctrines introduced by the Saracens, into Spain, which were making their way into the Universities of Europe.

In this work St. Thomas demonstrates the truth of revealed religion and triumphantly proves that Christianity can never be contrary to sound reason. The holy Doctor has written treatises on the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Creed, commentaries on various parts of Holy Scripture, and answers to sundry questions proposed to him for solution. Pope Urban IV. charged him with the task of collecting all the most beautiful passages of the Fathers of the Church on the Gospels. The result was his "Catena Aurea" or Golden "Chain," which is entirely made up of quotations, written in great part from memory. The Saint, as he travelled from convent to convent, had read the works, now of one, now of another, of the Fathers, and his marvellous memory enabled him to retain and transcribe the passages bearing on his subject. The most famous of his works is his "Summa of Theology," at which he labored, in the intervals of teaching and preaching, for the last nine years of his life, and which he did not live to complete.

Of this work, Pope John XXII. is reported to have said that St. Thomas had worked as many miracles as it contains articles; and its value is perhaps best attested by the hatred with which it has ever been regarded by heretics. In 1520, Luther caused it to be burnt in the public square at Wittenberg, and another of the so-called Reformers, Martin Bucer, exclaimed: "Suppress Thomas and I will destroy the Church." "A vain wish," remarks Pope Leo XIII., "but not a vain testimony." At the Council of Trent, three works of reference only were laid on the table of the hall of Assembly: they were the Holy Scriptures, the Pontifical Acts, and the "Summa" of St. Thomas; and from the "Summa"

the Catechism of the Council of Trent was compiled by three Dominican Fathers.

But perhaps St. Thomas's chief title to the love and veneration of the faithful generally is the part which he took in the institution of the Feast of Corpus Christi. When he presented to Pope Urban IV. the first part of his "Catena Aurea," about 1263, the delighted Pontiff wished in token of gratitude to raise him to the episcopate. But St. Thomas threw himself on his knees and implored the Holy Father to grant, as the only reward he would ever accept for his labors, that the Feast of the Blessed Sacrament, already established through the prayers of the Blessed Juliana and the influence of the Dominican Cardinal Hugh of St. Cher, in Germany and the Low Countries, should be extended to the Universal Church. Urban gladly consented, and ordered St. Thomas to write the Office of the Feast.

In this Office each of the responsories at matins is composed of two sentences, one drawn from the Old, and the other from the New Testament, which are thus made to render their united testimony to the great central mystery of Catholic belief. With its hymns, the *Vernum Supernum* and *Pange Lingua* we are all familiar, and specially with their concluding stanzas, the *O Salutaris* and the *Tantum Ergo*, always sung at Benediction; and from childhood our hearts have thrilled within us as we walked in processions of the Blessed Sacrament to the strains of the *Lauda Sion*.

Before presenting his Office to the Pope, St. Thomas placed it before the Tabernacle, and the miracle formerly worked at Paris was renewed, the words of approval proceeding from the lips of a crucifix still venerated at Orvieto. A similar testimony of Divine approval was granted to the Saint at Naples, and was witnessed by one of the Friars. On this occasion also our Lord spoke to him from a Crucifix which is preserved in the Church of San Domenico Maggiore, saying: "Thou hast written well of Me, Thomas. What reward wilt thou have?" To which the Saint fervently replied: "No other than Thyself, O Lord."

To the pen of St. Thomas we are also indebted for the *Adoro Te*, for beautiful devotions before and after Holy Communion, and many other prayers solid in doctrine and beautiful in expression. It is

a tradition that he composed the well-known prayer, the "Soul of Christ, sanctify me," which was a favorite one of St. Ignatius, who introduced it into his book of spiritual exercises, though leaving out the lovely petition, "Light of the sacred countenance of Jesus, shine down upon me," which is found in the old forms of the prayer. This petition occurs in the version of the *Anima Christi*, found in an old prayer-book called the "York Hours," where it is stated to have been indulgenced by Pope John XXII. when said after the elevation at Mass. This prayer-book was published in 1517, four years before the conversion of St. Ignatius.

### III.—Personal Traits.

St. Thomas was tall and inclined to corpulence, with a fine massive head, a lofty forehead, refined and handsome features, and large, gentle eyes beaming with benevolence. His manners were singularly winning and graceful; and his prodigious powers of mind were accompanied by a childlike simplicity of character, which, no less than the purity of his doctrine, gained for him the title of the "Angel of the Schools." Though raised so high above others by his gigantic intellectual powers, he was the sweetest and most charitable of masters and of fathers, always ready to stoop to the capacity of the youngest and dullest of his scholars.

No matter how important the affair might be on which he was engaged, his cell was always open to his brethren whenever they wished to speak to him, and he would cheerfully turn from the most absorbing occupation to give them his undivided attention. He listened to their difficulties, explained their doubts, and comforted them in their troubles. Nothing that concerned them was trifling in his eyes, and he never showed himself weary of their interruptions and importunities. In return, they bore him the tenderest affection; "Doctor noster," they loved to call him; and the sincerity of their attachment was amply proved by the bitterness of their grief when he was taken from them.

Long after his death, those who had known him could never speak of him without tears, so dearly did they love him. True son of St. Dominic, he cared only to speak of God or to God, and could not understand how Religious could take interest

in any other topic. If the conversation turned to other subjects, he ceased to take part in it; and he owned to his companions that it surprised him that a Religious could think of anything but God.

And what was perfectly incomprehensible to him was, how any one who knew himself to be in the state of mortal sin could eat, sleep, or be merry. When seculars came to seek advice and consolation from him, he lent them a willing ear, and after solving their doubts and consoling their sorrows, he never failed to tell them some short pious story or to speak a few words of edification, and then dismissed them, their hearts glowing with spiritual joy and divine love.

We can picture St. Thomas to ourselves enjoying his ordinary recreation of walking up and down the cloister of his convent, occasionally dragged off by his brethren to take a breath of fresh air in the garden, but sure in such cases soon to be found in some remote corner, absorbed in thought. Of this abstraction of mind, some amusing anecdotes are preserved, as, for example, that which shows him to us dining with St. Louis, and suddenly striking the table with his hand, exclaiming: "It is all up with the Manichees!" His companion gently endeavored to recall him to the remembrance of the royal presence, whilst the good-natured King instantly summoned a secretary to commit to writing the convincing argument which had just presented itself to the mind of his saintly guest.

Again at Naples, when the Cardinal Legate and the Archbishop of Capua came to visit him, he went to the cloister to receive them, but on the way became so absorbed in the solution of a theological difficulty, that, by the time he arrived, he had forgotten all about the business and the visitors that had called him, and stood like one in a dream. The Archbishop, who had formerly been his pupil, assured the Cardinal that these reveries were perfectly familiar to all who were acquainted with the Saint's habits. This abstraction of mind at times rendered him insensible to pain, as, for example, when a wax candle once burnt his hand, while he remained in thought, unconscious of the pain.

The austere life of St. Thomas and his incessant

labors increased the natural delicacy of his constitution, and he had frequent attacks of illness, which, however, do not appear ordinarily to have caused him to desist from the labor of composition. Surgery was rough and ready in the thirteenth century; and the extreme sensitiveness of St. Thomas's organization rendered its operations very terrible to him. On one occasion, when obliged to undergo a cautery, he begged the infirmarian to warn him of the coming of the surgeons, when he stretched himself on his bed and immediately went into ecstacy, remaining motionless whilst his flesh was burnt by the red-hot irons. His clothes were always the poorest in the convent, and his love of holy poverty was so great that his "Summa Against the Gentiles" was written on the back of old letters and other scraps of paper.

In vain did the Sovereign Pontiffs press upon his acceptance the Archbishopric of Naples and other ecclesiastical dignities, together with ample revenues; nothing could shake his determination to live and die a simple Religious; and they were obliged to withdraw their offers, being unwilling to afflict one so dear to them. He who was the oracle of his age loved to preach to the poor and lowly; and we are told that they always listened to him gladly and with much fruit to their souls. He was full of compassion for their wants, and even gave away his own clothes to cover them.

Humility was ever his characteristic virtue. So thoroughly had he realized the greatness of God, and his own nothingness, that in a moment of intimacy he was able to say to a friend: "Thanks be to God! never has my knowledge, my title of Doctor, nor any of my scholastic acts aroused in me a single movement of vainglory. If any motion has arisen, reason has instantly repressed it." From his humility sprang his extreme modesty in the expression of his opinion; never in the heat of disputation or at any other time was he known to lose his unruffled serenity of temper, or to say a word that could wound the feelings of another; and he bore the most cutting insults with imperturbable calmness. His life was full of examples of his spirit of humility and religious obedience.

On one occasion, when, as a young Religious, he

was reading in the refectory at Paris, he was told by the official corrector to pronounce a word in a way evidently incorrect. St. Thomas obeyed, and made the false quantity. When asked how he could have consented to so obvious a blunder, he replied: "It matters little whether a syllable be long or short; but it matters much to practice humility and obedience." In later years, when the Saint was teaching at Bologna, a lay brother obtained leave from the Prior to take as companion the first Religious brother whom he should find disengaged. Seeing St. Thomas, who was a stranger to him, walking up and down the cloister, he addressed himself to him, saying that the Prior wished him to accompany him through the city, where he had business to transact. The Saint, though suffering from lameness, and perfectly aware that the lay brother was under some mistake, immediately obeyed the summons, and went limping through the city after his companion, who, from time to time, found fault with his slowness.

When the lay brother discovered his mistake his apologies were profuse; but the Saint replied, "Don't be troubled, my dear brother; I am the one to blame. I am only sorry that I could not be more useful." To those who asked why he did not explain the mistake, he gave this golden answer: "Obedience is the perfection of the Religious life; by it man submits to man for the love of God, as as God rendered Himself obedient unto men for their salvation."

St. Thomas was very slow to believe evil of others; he always thought everyone was better than himself; but, when a fault was proved beyond the possibility of a doubt, he wept over it as though he had committed it himself; and his zeal demanded that it should be severely corrected, according to the saying of St. Augustine, "with charity towards the offender, and hatred against the sin."

One of the brethren once pressed him to say what he considered the greatest favor he had ever received from God, sanctifying grace, of course, excepted. After a moment's reflection, he replied: "I think that of having understood whatever I have read." He remembered everything he had once heard, so that his mind was like a well-stocked library. He often wrote, dictating at the

same time on other subjects to three or four secretaries, and never losing the thread of the arguments.

Of St. Tomas's manner of spending his day the following particulars have been preserved. After the short time absolutely necessary for sleep, he would rise in the night and come down to the church to pray, returning to his cell just before the bell rang for matins, that his vigil might pass unnoticed. He would then go down again to office with the community, often prolonging his prayer till daybreak. After preparing by penance, confession, and meditation, he celebrated the first Mass, and for his thanksgiving heard another Mass, which he often served.

He had composed prayers for all his daily actions, some of which are still preserved. At the elevation he was accustomed to repeat the words: "Thou, O Christ, art the King of Glory," with the remaining verses of the *Te Deum*. Although lawfully dispensed from attendance in choir by his duties of teaching and writing and by the numerous visits of those who sought his advice, he assisted with the rest of his brethren at all the hours of the Divine Office, at which he often shed tears of devotion.

When his morning spiritual exercises were ended, he gave his lectures on Theology or Holy Scripture, after which he returned to his cell and wrote or dictated till dinner-time. He ate but once in the day, and was perfectly indifferent to what was set before him. Indeed, in the refectory he was so absorbed in prayer and thought, as to become quite unconscious of external things, and his plate was often changed or his food taken away by the servers, without any notice on his part.

After dinner he conversed for a short time with the brethren, then refreshed his soul with a little spiritual reading, his favorite book being the *Conferences of Cassian*. After a short repose, he resumed his labors. Compline in choir with the chanting of the *Salve Regina* ended the day. The angelic Doctor was full of childlike devotion to Our Blessed Lady. His confessor, Brother Reginald, declared that St. Thomas had never asked anything through Mary without obtaining it; and the Saint himself specially attributed to her interces-

sion the grace of living and dying in the Dominican Order, according to his own earnest desire.

During the whole of one Lent, he preached on the words: "Ave Maria," and the same cherished words are to be found in his own hand-writing over and over again on the margin of an autograph copy of the "Summa Against the Gentiles," recently discovered in Italy. On his death-bed he confided to Brother Reginald that Our Lady had appeared to him several times, and assured him of the good state of his soul and the solidity of his doctrine. The holy Apostles SS. Peter and Paul also favored him with their visits, and explained to him difficult passages of Scripture. The Epistles of St. Paul were his favorite subjects of meditation, and he was accustomed to recommend them to others for the same purpose. He had a special devotion to St. Augustine, whose proper Office, still in use in the Dominican Order, he composed from the holy Doctor's work.

St. Thomas used to wear round his neck a relic of the virgin martyr, St. Agnes, of which he once made use to cure Brother Reginald of a fever, which attacked him on a journey to Naples; and from that time we are told the holy Doctor resolved to celebrate the feast of St. Agnes with special solemnity, and, with a touch of nature that showed human sympathy in the midst of his abstract studies, to have a better dinner provided in the refectory on that day.

"His marvellous science," says Brother Reginald, "was due far less to the power of his genius than to the efficacy of his prayer. Before studying, entering on a discussion, reading, writing, or dictating, he always gave himself to prayer. He prayed with tears to obtain from God the understanding of His mysteries, and abundant light was granted to his mind." If he met with a difficulty, he joined fasting and penance to his prayer, and all his doubts were dispelled. On one occasion, St. Bonaventure, coming to visit him, saw an angel assisting him in his labors.

Among his remarkable sayings may be mentioned the answer he gave to his sister, when she asked him what she must do to become a Saint. "Velle," he replied—*i. e.*, "Will it." Being asked what were the signs of the perfection of the soul,

he replied: "If I saw a man fond of trifles in conversation, desirous of honor, and unwilling to be despised, I would not believe him perfect, even if I saw him work miracles."

#### IV.—His Death. Honors Rendered Him by the Church.

On the feast of St. Nicholas, December 6th, 1273, St. Thomas was saying Mass in the chapel of the Saint in the convent of Naples, when he received a revelation which so changed him that from that time he could neither write nor dictate. Shortly afterwards, in answer to Brother Reginald's pressing entreaties, he said to him: "The end of my labors is come. All that I have written appears to me as so much straw, after the things that have been revealed to me. I hope in the mercy of God that the end of my life may soon follow the end of my labors."

He was suffering from illness when he received a summons from the Pope to attend the General Council convoked at Lyons for the reunion of the Greek and Latin Churches. The Saint therefore started from Naples, accompanied by Brother Reginald and some other Friars, on the 28th of January, A. D. 1274. On the way he was taken much worse. "If our Lord is about to visit me," he said to his companions, "it is better he shoud find me in a Religious house than among seculars."

As he was not within reach of a Dominican convent, he yielded to the pressing invitation of some Cistercian friends, and allowed them to carry him to their Abbey of Fossa Nuova. He went straight to the church to adore the Blessed Sacrament; and then, as he passed through the cloister, he exclaimed: "Here is the place of my rest for ever." He was lodged in the Abbot's room and waited upon with the utmost charity. The monks went themselves to the forest to cut wood for his fire; and on seeing them bringing a load into his chamber, the Saint cried out: "Whence is this that the servants of God should thus serve a man like me, bringing such heavy burdens from a distance?" In compliance with the earnest entreaties of the Cistercians, he began to expound to them the Canticle of Canticles; but he did not live to complete his exposition.

As his end approached, he with many tears made a general confession of his whole life to Brother Reginald, and then asked to be laid on ashes on the ground when the Holy Viaticum was brought to him. On beholding the Blessed Sacrament, he raised himself into a kneeling posture, and said in a clear and distinct voice, whilst the tears chased each other down his face: "I receive Thee, the price of my soul's ransom; I receive Thee, the Viaticum of my soul's pilgrimage; for Whose love I have studied, watched and labored, preached and taught. I have written much and have often disputed on the mysteries of Thy law, O my God; Thou knowest I have desired to teach nothing save what I have learnt from Thee. If what I have written be true, accept it as a homage to Thy Infinite Majesty; if it be false, pardon my ignorance. I consecrate all I have ever done to Thee, and submit all to the infallible judgment of Thy Holy Roman Church, in whose obedience I am about to depart this life."

Just before receiving the Sacred Host, he uttered his favorite ejaculation: "Thou, O Christ, art the King of Glory, Thou art the Everlasting Son of the Father." After receiving the Holy Viaticum, he made fervent acts of faith and love in the words of his own beautiful *Adoro Te*. On the following day, while receiving Extreme Unction, he calmly answered all the prayers, whilst the voices of the assistants were choked by their sobs. He tried to comfort his own brethren who were inconsolable at their approaching loss, and most gratefully thanked the Cistercians for their charity. One of them asked him what was the best way of living without offending God. "Be certain," replied the Saint, "that he who walks in the presence of God and is always ready to give Him an account of his actions will never be separated from Him by sin." They were his last words. Shortly after he fell into his agony and peacefully expired, March 7th, 1274, not having yet completed his 50th year.

On that same day, Blessed Albert, then at Cologne, burst into tears in the presence of the community, and exclaimed: "Brother Thomas Aquinas, my son in Christ, who was the light of the Church, is dead. God has revealed it to me."

At Naples, too, God was pleased to make known

the death of the Saint in a miraculous manner. One of the Friars, whilst praying in the church, fell into an ecstasy, in which he seemed to behold the Holy Doctor teaching in the schools, surrounded by a vast multitude of disciples. St. Paul the Apostle then appeared, with a company of Saints, and St. Thomas asked him if he had interpreted his Epistles rightly. "Yes," replied the Apostle, "as far as any one still in the flesh can understand them; but come with me; I will lead you to a place where you will have a clearer understanding of all things." The Apostle then seemed to lay his hand on St. Thomas's mantle and to lead him away; and the Friar who beheld the vision, startled the community by crying out three times in a loud voice: "Alas! Alas! our Doctor is being taken away from us!"

St. Thomas's funeral was celebrated at the Abbey with great solemnity. Brother Reginald made a short address, often interrupted by his own sobs and those of his hearers. He declared that, having been for many years St. Thomas's confessor, he could solemnly attest that the holy Doctor had never lost his baptismal innocence, and had died as pure and free from stain as a child of five years old. He then mentioned some particular favors which St. Thomas had forbidden him to reveal during his life-time.

Several revelations of the Saint's glory were made after his death, of which the following is perhaps one of the most interesting. A fervent disciple of his prayed earnestly that he might know the rank to which his beloved Master had been raised in glory. One day, as he was making his usual petition before the Altar of Our Lady, two venerable personages, encompassed with a marve-

lous light, suddenly stood before him. One of them was arrayed as a Bishop; the other wore the habit of a Friar Preacher, but it was resplendent with precious stones; on his head was a crown of gold and diamonds; from his neck hung two chains of gold and silver; and an immense carbuncle, in the form of a sun, shone upon his breast, shedding forth rays of light all around. "God has heard your prayer," said the former; "I am Augustine, Doctor of the Church, sent to acquaint you with the glory of Thomas Aquinas, who reigns with me and who has illuminated the Church with his knowledge. This is signified by the precious stones with which he is covered. That which shines on his breast signifies the right intention with which he has defended the faith; the others denote the books and writings he has composed. Thomas is my equal in glory: but he has surpassed me by the aureola of virginity."

St. Thomas was canonized by Pope John XXII. at Avignon, 1323. It was not until A. D. 1367 that the Dominicans succeeded in obtaining his body, which they conveyed to their convent at Toulouse, where it was received with every demonstration of honor. An annual festival is kept in the Order on January 28th, in memory of this translation, which was accompanied by many miracles. Valuable relics of the Saint have been given to various convents of the Order. At the time of the French Revolution, the Saint's remains were removed to the crypt of the Church of St. Sernin at Toulouse, where they still repose.

In 1567, St. Pius V. conferred on St. Thomas the title of Doctor of the Church; and Pope Leo XIII., by a Brief of August 4th, 1880, instituted him Patron of all Catholic Universities, Academies, Colleges, and Schools.